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ABSTRACT

The success of Charles C. Fries' Oral Approach to teaching English as a second language (ESL) as promoted in Japan by the English Language Exploratory Committee in the late 1950s and early 1960s is examined according to Jack Richards' four major factors that affect the course of a teaching method: appeals to facts; appeals to authority; form of the method proposal; and sanctions from above or support networks. The propagation of this approach in Japan encountered a number of obstacles: lack of support networks, entrenched pedagogical traditions, teachers' lack of oral proficiency, the large size of the program that the reformers were trying to change, the Japanese entrance-examination system, and differing aims of instruction. It is concluded that to effect change in an ESL program it is not enough for a method to be better. Because ESL is only one element in a complex social, economic, political, and cultural system, other factors must improve as well. (MSE)

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"Charles C. Fries in Japan: A Case Study in Methodological Reform"

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The idea that "improvements" are naturally, inevitably adopted has long been commonly accepted in our society. This thought is epitomized in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he builds his house in the woods the world will make a beaten path to his door."[1]

In our field of teaching English to speakers of other languages, materials developers and methodologists have typically concerned themselves with the question, "What is better?"

Their quest has focused primarily in two areas–linguistics and psychology. The guiding thought seems to have been "If we can just develop a better science of linguistics, or improve our understanding of how people learn languages, then ideal teaching methods and materials will naturally follow and be adopted and used by classroom teachers." Consequently, discussions of linguistic and psychological issues dominate our professional journals, our methodological guidebooks, and our conference presentations.

My thesis, however, is different–perhaps even a bit startling.

Good linguistics and psychology are important. There is no doubt about that. Nevertheless, although these two elements may be <u>necessary</u>, they are not <u>sufficient</u>. They alone cannot account for the successful implementation, spread, and survival of language-teaching methods and materials. Other factors must also be considered.

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1. Cited in John Bartlett, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 14th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), p. 605.

Implementation Factors/The "Secret Life" of Methods

In our professional literature, one of the few articles to recognize the importance of these implementation factors is "The Secret Life of Methods" by Jack Richards.[2]

Richards notes that "the rise and fall of methods depends upon a variety of factors extrinsic to a method itself, and often reflects the influence of fads and fashions, of profit-seekers and promoters, as well as the forces of the intellectual and educational marketplace."[3]

He outlines four major "factors that give a method its secret life":

Appeals to facts,

Appeals to authority,

Form of the method proposal, and

Sanctions from on high or Support networks.

An awareness of the nature and power of the social, political, and economic forces that operate in these areas is critical to an accurate understanding of the "rise and fall" of methods.

Particulars

The study which I will report on today investigates the case of the Oral Approach, a method for teaching English as a foreign language developed by Charles C. Fries, as it was promoted in Japan by the English Language Exploratory Committee (ELEC) in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

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2. Jack C. Richards, "The Secret Life of Methods," Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Toronto, 19 March 1983, and Jack C. Richards, "The Secret Life of Methods," *TESOL Quarterly*, 18 (1984), pp. 7-23.

3. Richards (1984), p. 13.

A study with similar goals was conducted by Coleman.[4] The purpose of his research was to "identify the various factors associated with the success or failure of efforts to further the advanced professional education" of prospective members of the professoriate at Mahidol University (Bangkok) and the National University of Zaire. .

Although the area of my study is quite different from Coleman's, my purpose has also been to "identify the various factors associated with the success or failure" of an attempt to change educational practices.

In conducting this research, I have done a lot of reading, but much of the important data was never published. The Fries family has been very supportive in allowing me access to important records. I have also found it necessary to travel throughout Japan and the United States interviewing people who worked with Charles C. Fries during the ELEC campaign. At that time, thirty years ago, most of them were young, up-and-coming graduate students or recent graduates. Now they are distinguished (and, for the most part, retired) professors, department heads, and even university presidents. I am grateful to them for their candor in discussing both the succeses and difficulties of long ago. The information they shared with me was very enlightening, and it is interesting and relevant to all of us who are involved in TESOL.

Charles C. Fries

Charles C. Fries, the major character in the drama, was born in 1887, almost 100 years ago. Originally a teacher of Greek and English literature, Fries became involved with American applied linguistics in its early stages. He was a founder member of the Linguistic Society of America and became its president in 1939. His major emphasis was in applying linguistics to pedagogy. In fact, in his history of English language teaching, Howatt calls

4. James S. Coleman, "Professorial Training and Institution Building in the Third World: Two Rockefeller Foundation Experiences," *Comparative Education Review*, 28 (1984), pp. 180-202.

Fries "the first applied linguist in the modern sense."[5] He was also the first director of the first English language institute in the United States, started at the University of Michigan in 1941, but that is a different story. To summarize it in a single line, the result of his efforts and experience in foreign language pedagogy was a method he called the Oral Approach.

I wish I had time to discuss his Oral Approach today. It was not the same thing as the audio-lingual method, you know. Nevertheless, because of time limits today, I will say only one thing. Although the present-day tendency is to think of Fries' ideas as belonging to one of two categories: "classic" (if you like him) or "old fashioned" (if you don't), for his time, Fries was a "radical,"[6] a great reformer, a pedagogical revolutionary! Perhaps more than anyone else of his time, he was instrumental in bringing about major changes in the way foreign languages were taught in the United States.

That, in and of itself, is a topic worthy of considerable discussion, but I will skip to the story of the attempt to implement his Oral Approach in Japan.

The Oral Approach in Japan

Actually, the story doesn't begin with Charles Fries. It begins with another, even more famous person–John D. Rockefeller III. In 1951, in New York City, he was elected president of the Japan Society. Shortly after that, he toured Japan with John Foster Dulles, who was then Secretary of State.

They were concerned about something very important–the future of the world. In the aftermath of WWII and Hiroshima, sensible people didn't want any more war, but they also realized that peace and the future of the world would depend on true communication among nations.

On a less idealistic note, this was also the time of the cold war, and the United States did not want Japan to go over to the Soviet side.

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7. A.P.R. Howatt, *A History of English Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 313.

6. TESOL Summer Institute notes, 1981.

Rockefeller and his associates were also naturally concerned with the economic recovery of Japan after World War II, the introduction of American technology into that country, and the establishment of strong economic ties between the United States and Japan.

A key factor in all of these areas was the interchange of scholarship and information, and this depended on the Japanese scholars' English language ability.

Unfortunately, the Japanese' command of English was generally deplorable. The traditional methods used to teach English in Japan were blamed for this state of affairs, and so, in 1956, Rockefeller and the people working with him established the English Language Exploratory Committee (ELEC). It was "a very big campaign,"[7] and its purpose was "to change English teaching methods in Japan."[8]

The leaders of ELEC planned and sponsored a special conference to be held in Tokyo in 1956, and they invited the top English-language-teaching scholars in the field from all over the world to come. Naturally, that group included Charles C. Fries.

The three purposes of this conference were...

1. To stimulate interest in English-teaching methods,
2. To spread the word about new methods (particularly, the American methods), and
3. To (eventually) produce materials for teaching English using these new methods.

In line with these purposes, Fries proposed to do two things:

1. Compile "good textbooks" (based on his Oral Approach principles), and

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7. Personal interview with Mamoru Shimizu, 6 September 1985.

8. Personal interview with Shigeharu Matsumoto, 5 September 1985.

2. Provide in-service training (or retraining) of teachers[9]

To accomplish these goals, he returned to Japan many times–in 1957, 1958, 1959. He typically went for a few months at a time in the spring, mostly to give lectures and work on a new materials guidebook called *Foundations for English Teaching* that ELEC would later publish. About 1960, the work on that book was completed, and Fries did not return to Japan until 1966.

ELEC also produced a textbook series, called *New Approach to English*, which was, of course, based on Fries' Oral Approach. It was for junior high school English classes. Fries' idea was "to re-educate, give good training to, junior high school teachers, and thus change the quality of teaching from the bottom up."[10]

Fries also traveled all over Japan giving lectures to Japanese teachers of English. He was a powerful, persuasive speaker, and he was "very popular."[11] There were "great audiences wherever he went."[12]

In 1963, ELEC was incorporated. It became an "education council," not just an "exploratory committee," (but its acronym was still ELEC). With Rockefeller money, and funds from other sources, ELEC constructed its own impressive building in Tokyo. It was seven stories high, with an auditorium, its own recording studio, and 21 classrooms.

Success?

Now, as we consider this campaign, the first questions that come to mind are generally, "Was Fries successful in Japan?" or better, "Was ELEC a success?" Yes, or no?

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9. Personal interview with Akira Ota, 5 September 1985.

10. Shimizu.

11. Personal interview with Genji Takahashi, 4 September 1985.

12. Personal interview with Tamotsu Yambe, 3 September 1985.

Well, it's not so simple. Success is not a simple dichotomy. It usually comes in degrees rather than absolutes.

Furthermore, there are different kinds of success, and it is normal for a campaign to be successful in some areas and not in others.

A better question (modeled after Coleman's) is "What factors were associated with the various successes and failures of the ELEC effort?" And along with that question comes another one: "How did the ELEC workers deal with these obstacles?"

These are the really important questions. For you and me, ELEC and Charles Fries are history. We have English teaching of today (and tomorrow) to be concerned about. But the lessons we can learn from Fries' experiences in Japan can help us in our future. Many of the obstacles that ELEC encountered, are still around today. Some of them are unique to Japan, but others are found virtually everywhere.

If we can learn from ELEC's experience in Japan and use those lessons to avoid or overcome these obstacles in the future, then (in that sense) even ELEC's failures can be successes.

The major lesson to be learned from this experience is that coming up with a better mousetrap...er, method, is not enough. The linguistic and psychological bases of Fries' Oral Approach are important, but they alone cannot explain the spread of the Oral Approach in Japan, and the resistance it encountered.

Richards' four "secret life" implementation factors do a much better job of accounting for ELEC's success and failures, but even these factors are not adequate. I have found it necessary to make a few additions to Richards' list.

Before going on, I need to explain one thing. It's probably not fair to blame most of the problems I am going to discuss on Fries himself.[13] As one of the Japanese men who worked with him closely said, "He was a scholar."

13. Takahashi.

He was above such things; they were beneath him. I like that. It's kind of a pun, you see. It has two meanings. One is that they were not within the scope of his concern. But in another sense, like "the floor is beneath me," these were fundamental things that were critical to the successful implementation of the Oral Approach in Japan.

Unfortunately, due to time limitations, the discussion of these implementation factors will have to be very abbreviated today. For those who are interested, there is much more detail in the written version of the paper.

For the most part, I will use Richards' four implementation factors as an organizing framework. The first of these is "appeals to facts."

Appeals to Facts

The "facts" that come from research provide one way of validating a method and persuading people to adopt it. According to Richards, this may be "true" research (based on an experimental design) or pseudo-research. Unfortunately, most research on the effectiveness of language-teaching methods (including the Oral Approach) falls into the latter category.

Fries or his colleagues did not randomly assign students to groups, use the Oral Approach with one and traditional methods with the other, and compare the outcome. To be fair, however, I should also note that the use of social science, empirico-statistical methods was unheard of in the field of linguistics, or applied linguistics at that time.[14] Much research was done to support the Oral Approach, but it was of a completely different type.

In Japan, "research" on the Oral Approach began even before ELEC started. A young scholar named Yambe went to Michigan in the early 1950's. Later, when he returned to Japan, he tried some of what he had seen, and he liked the way it worked. That was his "experiment."[15] Of course, that was a really just a one-shot case study, not a true experiment.

14. Personal interview with Robert Lado, 26 November 1985.

15. Yambe.

Later, another, much larger Oral Approach "experiment" was conducted in Japan, and ELEC published an entire book about it, including tables of statistics showing favorable results.[16] The research design, however, was still not adequate to overcome threats to the study's validity. By Richards' criteria this study would still be classified as "pseudo-research." Nevertheless, an entire book of Oral Approach "research" (of any kind) must have been impressive. It surely convinced at least some people of the Oral Approach's validity and encouraged its spread in Japan.

Appeals to Authority

A common alternative to research is appealing to authority. There are two types of "authority": current theoretical constructs and recognized experts in the field. The Oral Approach had plenty of support in both respects.

First, the Oral Approach was based on structural linguistics, the new, "scientific study of language," and in the 1940's and 50's, anything that was "scientific" had to be good. Of course, the scientific label was not just promotional hype. The Oral Approach materials were truly based on a careful, scholarly study of language. As I noted earlier, this was one of Fries' great contributions to language pedagogy.

Another theoretical construct which promoted the Oral Approach was its compliance with the learning theory "zeitgeist" of the day, behaviorism. Fries frequently mentioned habit formation, even though a careful reading reveals that he was not nearly as mechanistic as many scholars in his day were. Still, Fries stayed in line with the then popular theories of learning, and that was a "plus" for his Oral Approach in those days. Later, of course, as learning theories changed, it became a liability.

Still another important virtue of the Oral Approach was its efficiency. Fries' supporters in Japan proclaimed that the Oral Approach provided "a

16. Akio Yamaura, *Toyonekko's Class* (Tokyo, ELEC, 1979).

maximum amount of oral practice within a minimum of time."[17] Pattern practice was touted as "the most efficient teaching technique that has ever been devised."[18]

Besides referring to *what* is professionally popular, method promoters also frequently refer to *who* is professionally popular. The support of these recognized authorities for a new teaching approach can be its lifeblood. For example, if you cannot prove experimentally that your method works, you can say, "Well, Earl Stevick likes my method," and in the shadow of his authority most people will not even notice that your research support is shoddy or absent.

In this respect also, the Oral Approach did very well. In his day, Fries was probably the greatest authority in American applied linguistics. His Oral Approach did not have to rely on others for its support. He himself could function as its validating authority. That, of course, is one of the reasons why ELEC invited him to Japan. That was a major purpose of the first ELEC specialists conference in 1956. Along with Fries came other authorities also—A. S. Hornby, Freeman Twaddell—men regarded by the Japanese as "giants" and "kings." Their assent and support for ELEC lent even greater credibility and power to its campaign to revolutionize English teaching in Japan.

Form of the Method Proposal

Richards' third implementation factor is the form of the method proposal. Is it a publishable textbook, or merely an instructional philosophy?

Richards claims that "methods that lead to texts have a much higher adoption and survival rate than those which do not."[19] This is primarily

17. Tamotsu Yambe, "C. C. Fries Re-evaluated: His Contributions to the Teaching of English in Japan," *Bulletin of Toyoko Women's Junior College* 18 (1982), p. 6.

18. Yambe, "C. C. Friees Re-evaluated...", p. 23.

19. Richards (1984), p. 14.

because publishers, who gain nothing from an instructional philosophy unless it leads to book sales, are the major promoters of texts and the methods upon which they are based. They do this through mail advertisements, conference presentations, book exhibits, and even direct visits to schools and institutions.

In the Oral Approach, both materials and philosophy were important. The "Michigan method" was highly dependent on the carefully prepared "Michigan materials," the red, yellow, and green "rainbow books." These books were widely circulated and helped spread the Oral Approach throughout the United States. In fact, Richards uses them as an example of success.

In Japan it was different. Some of Fries' early disciples tried to use the Michigan books, but they found them unsuitable. Besides, in those days when contrastive analysis reigned supreme, it seemed essential to have English books designed specifically for Japanese speakers. For this reason, one of the major purposes of ELEC was to produce special Oral Approach materials for Japan.

ELEC's textbook publishing experience teaches an important lesson. In the secret life of a method, to publish or not to publish a textbook is not the only question. There's more to it than that. A very important consideration is *who* publishes it. What is the name of the publishing house?

First of all, I should emphasize that "choosing the publisher was not Fries' responsibility." That was someone else's job. Unfortunately, "the Japanese people who worked with Fries did not know that the choice of publisher was so important."[20] One of Fries' ELEC colleagues told me, "We thought better textbooks would sell better."[21] (As simple as that. You make a better book; people will buy it. You make a better mousetrap; the world will beat a path to your door.) Another of Fries' Japanese co-workers said, "He probably thought that if he produced good textbooks, everything else would take place

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20. Ota.

21. Matsumoto.

naturally."[22] Unfortunately, that was a mistaken assumption, as subsequent events bore out.

The *New Approach to English* textbooks were finally published in 1962. It had taken the ELEC team of American and Japanese materials producers, which Fries supervised, five years to produce these textbooks.

When the new Oral Approach textbooks were finally ready, they created quite a stir. Many people were interested in them. Nevertheless, the series was not widely adopted. Eventually, after just about three years– fewer years than it took to produce the books–publication was discontinued.

This was definitely a great disappointment to the people at ELEC. But it was not necessarily a failure. "The ELEC books did not last, but others were influenced by them."[23] "Although they seemed like a failure, they left a permanent impression. They were imitated by other publishers."[24]

That raises another question: "Why did other books succeed where the ELEC books had 'failed'?" The answer reveals an important aspect of the "secret life" of methods.

Older and wiser now, the people who worked with Fries in Japan told me: "We made a mistake in selecting the publisher. Publishers have a long tradition, and strong relationships with English teachers" and the other people who choose textbooks. "The sale of textbooks in Japan depends on a publisher's connections and influence." For a textbook to sell well, the "publisher must have sales agents all over Japan. These agents must have good relationships with the people who choose textbooks for the various prefectures and city wards." Unfortunately, ELEC's publisher didn't have the proper connections. Furthermore, it "specialized in linguistics, not secondary

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22. Ota.

23. Personal interview with Ikuo Koike, 6 September 1985.

24. Shimizu.

English."[25] Its salesmen were not successful in making inroads against the established English textbook publishers who already had the right connections.

Sanctions from on High / Support Networks

Let's go to the fourth and perhaps the most interesting implementation factor. Richards originally called it "sanctions from high," from up above, but he later changed that to "support networks."

There are various types of support networks. All of them are important, and unfortunately, in all of these areas, ELEC and Fries' Oral Approach had trouble.

Professional Teaching Organizations

First, let's look at professional teaching organizations. In Japan today there are many organizations of English teachers. There were not so many in the 1950's. JALT, TESOL's Japan affiliate, did not exist at that time. JACET, the Japan Association of College English Teachers, started in 1961, well after the founding of ELEC. Other organizations, however, did exist at that time.

There was the *Nihon Ebun Gakkai* (an association of college teachers of English literature and linguistics). It was founded in 1916 and was a very powerful, and very traditional, organization. ELEC had no contact with this association. (Maybe that was a good thing. The two organizations were radically different, and conflict might have been inevitable.)

Zen Eiren, a very widespread organization of junior and senior high school English teachers in Japan, was founded in 1951, before ELEC. A connection between *Zen Eiren* and ELEC would have been both natural and beneficial—especially to ELEC. Nevertheless, Fries had connections only with ELEC,[26] and ELEC had no relationships with teacher organizations. That was a problem when it came to implementing the Oral Approach in Japan.

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25. Ota.

26. Personal interview with Hatori Hiroyoshi, 3 September 1985.

Universities

Let's go to another type of support network–universities. In the United States, Fries and the Oral Approach were associated with the then highly prestigious University of Michigan program.

In Japan, although University prestige is extremely important, Fries and ELEC had few connections with powerful Japanese universities, and none of them officially supported the Oral Approach. With such support and endorsement, the story of the Oral Approach in Japan might have been substantially different. But it did not happen that way.

Professional Journals

In the United States, Michigan had its own journal, *Language Learning*, which spread the news of the Michigan method all over the country and also lent prestige, power, and credibility to Fries' Oral Approach.

In Japan, there was also a publication, the *ELEC Bulletin*. It was a good publication, but it was not nearly as influential as *Language Learning*. It was not associated with an important university and it was not so widely read. As a result, the Oral Approach was not so well supported, but at least they had a publication.

Educational Agencies

Support from educational agencies is the last of Richards' implementation factors. He gives an example from France where, in 1902, the Minister of Education "gave official approval to the Direct Method. It became the only approved method for teaching foreign languages in France."[27]

Such endorsements are very powerful, and if Fries and the Oral Approach had been officially endorsed by the Japanese Ministry of Education (the Monbusho) the rest would have been relatively simple. Unfortunately, that's not what happened.

27. Richards (1984), p. 15.

ELEC tried to go around the bureaucracy. They tried to ignore the Monbusho. They had their new ideas. They had their Rockefeller money. Why should they get bogged down in red tape?[28]

Their intention was to speed up the process of implementing the Oral Approach in Japan. That was a serious tactical error. Rather than speeding things up, it led to problems.

A rivalry developed between ELEC and the Ministry. As one ELEC worker told me, "At the beginning, ELEC and Monbusho fought."[29] It was a classic struggle--the traditional (Japanese) power versus the young (American) upstart. There are several different versions of exactly what happened (I won't take time to go into all of them today), but they all agree that in the end ELEC got the worst of it. As one ELEC insider told me, "That was a tragedy--for ELEC."[30]

Other Factors

Richards outlined four factors, but I have come to the conclusion that other factors must also be considered if the successes and difficulties of the ELEC effort in Japan are to be accounted for adequately.

Size of the program

One critical factor is the size of the program to be changed. Japan's English language education program is massive. As one experienced educator put it, "The greatest obstacle to change in English teaching in Japan is the large number of people studying and teaching it." "Because of the large number of English teachers in Japan, changes occur more slowly."[31]

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28. Shimizu.

29. Personal interview with Osamu Kimpara, 3 September 1985.

30. Shimizu.

31. Personal interview with Yoichi Maeda, 6 September 1985.

This problem has several sources and a number of implications in other areas, to be discussed shortly.

Training/Abilities of Teachers

Another important factor is the training and abilities of teachers, and their teaching traditions. English teaching in Japan is not a purely modern phenomenon. As a nation, the Japanese have been enthusiastically studying English for well over 100 years, and they have studied other languages for thousands of years. As a result, there are strong pedagogical traditions in Japanese foreign language teaching.

Such traditions change slowly. In many ways schools are self-duplicating institutions. That is fine if teachers were taught with good methods and materials, but it often means "reproduction of a bad tradition."[32] In such a situation, the old saying "Teachers teach the way they were taught" is true to a discouraging extent. Furthermore, in Japan, most English teachers were (and still are) trained in university departments of English literature.

ELEC's founders recognized this problem, and one of ELEC's major purposes was to re-train experienced teachers, thus bringing about reform. ELEC conducted many summer seminars for English teachers. From 1957 to 1965, a total of 5,889 teachers attended these summer seminars. By 1984, this total had risen to 10,028.

Although these figures are impressive, the 27-year total still represents less than 10% of the total number of junior and senior high school English teachers in the country today.

Another discouraging observation, made by a Monbusho official (the Ministry of Education also conducts training seminars for teachers), is that "the teachers of English who need in-service training, seminars, or workshops,...rarely or almost never attend them."[33] This is the unfortunate

32. Personal interview with Ken Kanatani, 3 September 1985.

33. Linju Ogasawara, *The Language Teacher*, (1982), p. 18.

state of affairs in teacher-training virtually everywhere. Those who need help the most are the last ones to come to such seminars. They comprise a "hard core" implementation obstacle that is next to impossible for methodological revolutionaries to overcome–especially if other, social, political, and economic factors are not conducive to change.

Motivation to Change (or Lack of It)

Another important consideration is motivation to change (or lack of it). Idealist reformers who think teachers will change to a new method simply because it is better ignore an important factor which one of the veteran Japanese teachers I interviewed neatly summed with the words, "Why should they change? They are paid."[34]

In Japan, (and most other places), teachers' salaries remain the same regardless of the method they use, and they have little other material motivation to change. For Japanese teachers of English in the 1950's, the Oral Approach was unfamiliar. They would have had to spend extra time and effort just to learn how to use it. Heavily burdened with large classes, they did not have such time. Furthermore, it required extensive speaking of English, and "not many of the teachers themselves [could] really speak English."[35] Under such circumstances, it would have been truly surprising if many had adopted the Oral Approach.

Timing

Another important factor, which was largely beyond the control of Fries and the other Oral Approach promoters in Japan, is timing.

In some respects, the timing of the effort to implement the Oral Approach was good. After the war and during the occupation, there was widespread interest in learning English and in reforming the methods used to teach it. Many other aspects of the Japanese schooling system had recently changed.

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34. Takahashi.

35. Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: the Story of a Nation* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1974), p. 299.

In other ways, however, the timing of the ELEC effort was unfortunate.

In the years before and during World War II, most Japanese stopped studying English, so the number of English users and their proficiency declined. Then, almost immediately after the war, during the American occupation, there was a great need for English-speaking Japanese. The few who could be found were needed as translators and interpreters, and thus were not available to teach. Those who remained to teach English were generally the oldest and the least proficient in the language.[36] This was a serious problem for the ELEC effort when it began in the 1950's.

In the 1960's, when these problems began to alleviate, another one surfaced. At the same time that the Oral Approach was being promoted in Japan, it began to be criticized in the United States. "Chomsky's attacks on the Oral Approach's foundation [structural linguistics and habit-formation learning theory] came at the time when the Oral Approach was just beginning to catch on in Japan."[37] Awareness of these criticisms undermined Japanese teachers' new faith in the Oral Approach and hindered its spread.

Examination System

No discussion about reforming English language teaching in Japan would be complete without referring to the famous (or infamous) high school and university entrance examinations, which form "the whole 'purpose' of Japanese primary and secondary education."[38]

These examinations test knowledge of English, but they focus on points of grammar and translation and, for various reasons, do not test proficiency in spoken English. This, of course, spells trouble for a language-teaching approach whose orientation is predominantly oral.

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36. Koike.

37. Ota.

38. Notes (1982), p. 8.

At first, "Fries did not concern himself with 'problems' such as the exam system." Later, however, he did realize the necessity of addressing this concern. Speaking of a learner's goals, Fries said,

> Or his final goal may be merely the passing of an examination for a university–an examination in which translation is the only requirement. No matter what the final goal of the person who starts to learn English I believe...that what we have called the "oral approach" is the most efficient, the most time-saving way to begin the study of English.[39]

Others were not so optimistic. They found they could not ignore examination "backwash." Although one called the effect of the entrance examinations "the most pitiable thing" he concluded that "for the present, until the exams change, grammar-translation teaching is 'a necessary evil.'"[40]

Even thirty years ago, such complaints were not new. Regarding the problem of Japanese students who cannot speak English–even after studying it for so many years–a group at an English teachers conference in 1914 made the following statement: "It would be easy to remedy that defect if only the higher schools would have oral tests bearing on hearing and speaking besides the written examination." More than 70 years later, English teachers in Japan are still awaiting such tests of oral English.

Of course, administering oral tests to the millions of Japanese students who take the entrance exams every year is easier said than done. Such tests cannot be given en masse as written exams are. The serious manpower shortage[41] that would result is a function of the large size of Japan's English-language-teaching program, mentioned earlier as an implementation factor.

A glimmer of hope is on the horizon. Tape-recorded listening comprehension sections have appeared in a number of entrance

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39. Charles C. Fries, "On the Oral Approach," in *Applied Linguistics and the Teaching of English*, ed. Tamotsu Yambe (Tokyo: ELEC, 1970), p. 204.

40. Takahashi.

41. Takahashi.

examinations in recent years. They encourage the development of oral English skills. "About 30 prefectural boards of education and 36 universities now use tapes."[42] These small changes are the result of many forces, of course, but "ELEC may have contributed a little–in the impetus."[43]

Conflicting Aims

Related to the examination "problem" is the problem of conflicting aims within the same system.

While many in Japan study English for practical purposes, others feel that the proper aim of English study is cultural. You study a second language to develop your intelligence, to help you understand your own native language grammar and culture, as well as the target language's literature, even if you never actually speak the target language. For such aims, an oral approach may not be as suitable as the traditional grammar-translation method.

Similar debates regarding the proper purpose of foreign language study occurred in the United States in the nineteenth century. The debate is still raging in Japan. According to a recent survey, however, the practical side seems to be gaining–even at the university level.

Of course, these changes are taking place about thirty years too late for Fries, ELEC, and the Oral Approach in Japan. On the other hand, they may have helped bring the changes about.

Summary/Conclusion

To summarize, the English Language Education Council and Charles C. Fries devoted a great deal of time, effort, and money to the propagation of the Oral Approach in Japan. In doing so, they encountered a number of obstacles that needed to be overcome if this campaign was to meet with success:

Lack of support networks

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42. Koike.

43. Shimizu.

Educational agencies (the Ministry of Education)

Publishing houses (choosing the right one)

Pedagogical traditions (firmly entrenched)

Teachers' lack of oral English proficiency

The large size of the program they were trying to reform

The Japanese entrance-examination system

Differing aims of instruction

Whether Fries and ELEC were successful in overcoming these obstacles, or even how successful they were, is not really the main point here today. The point is that building a "better" method is not enough.

In order for a new, "better" method to catch on and be widely used, a number of other important conditions must be satisfied. English language teaching is only one element in a complex social, economic, political, and cultural system. Teaching practices cannot be expected to change until the other elements do.

Maybe you knew that before. If so, I apologize for wasting your time here today.

If not, if at least some of this has been new and enlightening for you and you now realize that focusing exclusively on content and method issues is insufficient, and that ignoring the large, inter-connected system in which we language teachers operate is pedagogically perilous,then my time preparing this paper has been well spent.

Since this research is still in progress, I invite your comments. Feedback and suggestions are most welcome, especially comments regarding other

analytical models and frameworks that might be appropriate for this kind of research.

Thank you for your attention.